

We had folks in those days that the judge said, “Either you go to jail or you join the Army.” So, how do you get them motivated? And, you know, I was the guy who came out of Ranger and Airborne Schools, and we did the chants and we did our runs, and that was new and different for an armored division. Nowadays, this happens all over the Army. It was a real developing experience.

62d Engineer Battalion (Construction)

Q: You left the 23d Engineer Battalion about November of 1959, I think, right? Then you went to the 62d Engineer Battalion (Construction) at Fort Leonard Wood. What position did you go into in the 62d?

A: I went back to being a platoon leader again. That was one of the real problems of the period, a real morale breaker. You have to be cognizant of such things when you’re doing reorganization things to force structure like we are today. I went from all the excitement of being on the frontier of freedom and all the missions in Europe, back to a unit in the continental United States that was well down the priority curve—short of officers, among other things. The officer they had deleted was the company exec out of every company. You were either the company commander or you were a platoon leader.

Now, you need to know, I guess it’s pertinent, how I arrived there because, in fact, I didn’t want to leave Germany, and I had written the Seventh Army Engineer and asked to extend my tour and stay. It turns out the commanding general of Fort Leonard Wood of that day, who was also the commander of the 18th Engineer Brigade, which was located there, had just complained to his personnel boss. This happened to be the Chief of Engineers at that time because an engineer personnel officer was in the Office of the Chief. He complained that he was always getting shortchanged and never got any Regular Army officers. So, they decided to fix that and thus sent 12 Regular Army lieutenants to Fort Leonard Wood beginning in the summer of ’59.

I was the 12th to arrive. I needed to be a company commander and I wanted to be a company commander. I was told, “You can be a company commander in March, but all those positions are filled for now.” They really were, by all of those other 12 who had arrived. We were all peers from peer groups ’55, ’56, ’57, coming back from many places, most of them from Germany. So, I begrudgingly became a platoon leader again.

The other interesting point about all of that is, having got his 12 Regular Army lieutenants the summer of ’59, they were all gone by the summer of ’60. So, the longest one there lasted a year. I was the last to arrive, in November. I was gone by May 1960. Almost all 12 were selected for civil schooling, and we moved off to go to our civil schools that summer. So, I arrived at Leonard Wood, and they told me that they’d give me a company command in March. One week later my orders came out for civil schooling in June, and they said, “Forget

it.” So, I spent a cold winter as a platoon leader, building the runway extension on the airfield at Fort Leonard Wood.

Q: I was going to ask you what sorts of projects the 62d was involved in there.

A: Well, we had a couple but the airfield was principally mine. We were involved, as was a lot of the 18th Engineer Brigade, in building the golf course that’s there today.

We had regular training and took an Army training test there, but to do the right thing to allow aviation at the airfield, they needed to extend the runway 1,000 feet. To extend it, we either had to put in a big fill on one end or cut off a hillside on the other end. They elected to cut off the hillside at the end near post. That was my platoon’s job, and we worked on it through those months in the cold winter of Missouri. I had most of the equipment assets of the battalion—that is, the dozers, the tractor-scrapers.

In addition, because we had quite a hillside to cut away, I was given, on detail, the assets of the tractor-scraper school. That is, they’d come out and use that hillside as their practical experience. So, there were many days when my platoon sergeant and I would be out there with 20 to 25 tractor-scrapers roaring about. We were not only trying to guide them, we were trying to stay out of their way. There were always, of course, four or five that were changing tires. These were not trained troops; these were troops having their first experience on a tractor-scraper.

To finish that experience—we did all the grade work, took the hill down and then did the shaping necessary with base course so that it could then be paved. Then a contractor paved it.

Q: So, the Army engineer enlisted training was done at Fort Leonard Wood at that time, was it, or a lot of it?

A: Well, yes, a lot of it. Maybe all of it.

Q: Equipment operation?

A: I just don’t really know. I know that the tractor-scraper school was there, but I was on the troop side so I knew very little about what else went on at the installation. We had four or five battalions at Fort Leonard Wood at that time. The 18th Brigade was a very substantial brigade-level headquarters.

Q: You referred to this earlier. Do you want to expand on the comparison you were making between the 23d in Germany and the 62d at Fort Leonard Wood—perhaps a bit of an unfair comparison, but it’s interesting in terms of at least what’s going to come later with Vietnam.

A: It is a point of one unit, the 23d, which has a really cohesive mission and a high priority versus a unit, the 62d, which did not have a focused mission that prompted much get up and go and enthusiasm and also suffered from a low priority. I just mentioned the number of officers as an example, but it also was reflected in the kind of equipment we had. The Army has its priority list now. It was the same priority thing then.

It was really a comedown for me to have participated in realistic Army training tests in Europe over many miles, exemplified by the example of the challenge of planning a bridge operation on the go, figuring out how you were going to fix the bridge before it went in, compared to taking Army training tests at Fort Leonard Wood, a very small installation where we couldn't roam very far and where we did not even have Army maps. We took that Army training test on Texaco maps because the regular ones weren't available. We were short so much and the standards of training were just so far lower than in Europe that it was a substantial change. It just made me think that we should never let a unit of the Army get into this kind of a situation if we can affect it.

Q: Now, you started out, I think, indicating that we should keep these things in mind with what we're doing with the force structure today. Right? The effect on morale when we're changing, we ought to keep that in mind with what we're doing now with reducing the military. I wonder if you could comment on that.

A: Yes, what I meant by that was, as we start making decisions on the build-down of the Army, we're planning to take out 35,000 annually. We've decided that's the ramp we could do considering the impact on the Army with all the personnel policies that will impinge on promotions, selections, and job satisfaction. We need to make sure we don't do something like, say, eliminating the company exec, because there's a building block that says after you've been a platoon leader so long, you should be given another development opportunity. I felt very little satisfaction, having been a platoon leader, having been a company exec, having been an assistant S-3, then going back and driving a platoon after three years of service. So, what I meant was, let's don't set up some scheme that fits the bean-counter notions but that really adversely impacts on a person's self-esteem, job satisfaction, and development. That's what I was referring to.

University of Illinois

Q: You indicated that all of your peers were getting ready to go back for civil schooling at that time, so you must have been doing some thinking during this period about where you'd like to go, what you'd like to do. How did you arrive at those decisions?

A: Well, in those days we received a form from Engineer Branch that said that I was selected for civil school, pick where I wanted to go. I submitted my desires by university choice and by discipline choice, and then the powers that be decided who was going where. Then I was told in December of '59 that I was going to go to the University of Illinois to study civil engineering with a physics minor for 20 months. So, that's the way it came back to me. I'd indicated Illinois as a choice and I'd indicated civil engineering. I don't recall if I'd indicated physics as a minor or some other program as a choice, but it was a one, two, three kind of choice indication.